



Concordia Creative Writing

VOLUME THREE, NUMBER ONE, FALL 1992

Sharon Thesen

Leading a Literary Life

Pressing Matters Part 2

*NuAge Editions and the Moosehead
Anthology: Here to Stay*

Irving Layton Awards 1992

*Plans announced to honor Concordia's
most respected literary voice*

The Master's Voice

*An upcoming collection of graduate
writing from Concordia*

PLUS

Henry Beissel *on writing for children*

Arjun Basu *finds life after graduation*

The Canada Council *cuts funding for readings*

CCW News *gets with the Program*

AND MORE

Concordia Creative Writing

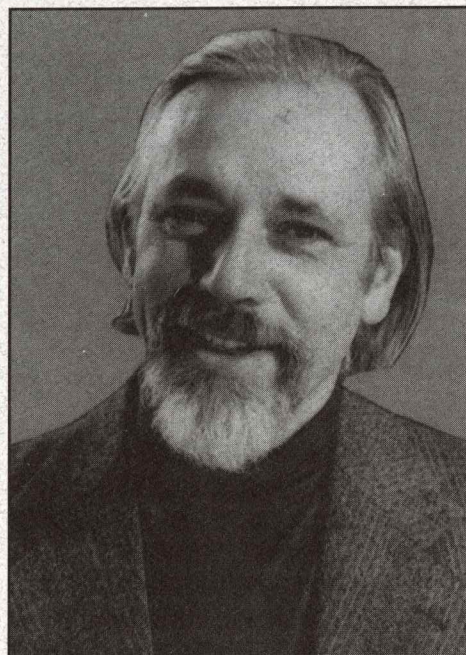
VOLUME THREE, NUMBER ONE, FALL 1992

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR Terry Byrnes
DESIGN & PRODUCTION Marc Elias
EDITORIAL BOARD Raymond
Beauchemin, Marc Elias, Louise
Hooley, Steve Szigeti, Denise Tarr

We gratefully acknowledge assistance
from CONCORDIA'S THURSDAY REPORT.
COVER PHOTOGRAPH Jonas Papaurelis

Concordia Creative Writing is published
twice a year. It is produced entirely by
Creative Writing students and faculty at
Concordia University. We are gener-
ously supported by the Dean of Students
Office, the Department of English, the
Graduate Students' Association, and the
Concordia Alumni Association.

WRITE TO: Terry Byrnes, Concordia
Creative Writing, Department of
English, LB-501, Concordia University,
1455 de Maisonneuve Blvd. West,
Montréal, Québec, H3G 1M8.



Henry Beissel

Writing for the child inside

or how to write for Sarah and Jason
by Henry Beissel

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A
duck called Dugood who
decided she wanted to be a
storyteller for all the little duck-
lings on the pond. Dugood felt she knew
everything about the pitfalls of life, and she
wanted to warn the young ones. She struggled

up a big rock in the middle of the pond and
began to quack-quack her stories about the
do's and don'ts of duck survival. The other
grown-up ducklings nodded their heads and,
from time to time, quacked along with her,
but the little ducklings paid no attention.
What Dugood was quacking at them they had
all heard before. They were more interested in
swimming and diving and exploring the bot-
tom of the pond. Duck Dugood became quite
frantic and quacked in shriller and shriller
tones—until her voice cracked and she died of
a broken vocal cord. The little ducklings never
noticed; there were so many grown-up ducks
forever quacking the same thing.

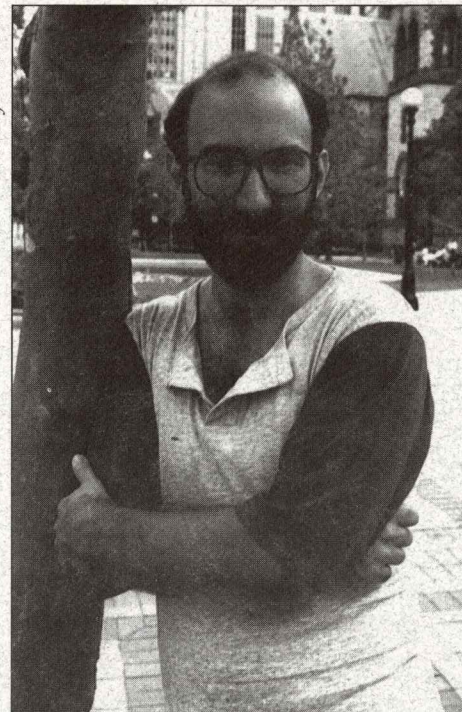
Children don't exist

The moral of the tale? Don't write for
children! Children don't exist. There is only
five-year-old Sarah and seven-year-old Jason
and all the other boys and girls that plague and
delight us. Write for them individually, write
for a specific child in the circle of your family
and friends—enchant her or him with your
story, and maybe you've got something that
Sarah and Jason will want to hear.

The trouble with the abstract approach is
that it's invariably coupled with an abstract
motivation: the obsessive determination to
instruct. Nothing is more deadly to the
creation of any literary work, especially one

Continued on page 7

Photo by Denise Tarr



Raymond Beauchemin

The Master's Voice

a new project anthologizes Concordia graduates
by Denise Roig Tarr

IT STARTED AS SO MANY GOOD IDEAS DO:
with two friends talking. In this case,
they happened to be writers—just-grad-
uates of the Concordia Creative Writing
Masters program—and the talk had to do with

the subject writers often discuss when they get
together: getting published.

"It was just after the Graduate Research
Symposium last April," remembers Raymond
Beauchemin, who had just presented his
Creative Writing thesis in an oral, abbreviated
form to the symposium. Afterwards, one of
the organizers mentioned to Beauchemin and
Mansel Robinson (who had also presented his
Creative Writing thesis) that money was avail-
able from the Graduate Students Association
for student publications.

Combing through theses

"Mansel and I looked at each other and we
pretty much knew she wasn't talking about
publishing *our* theses," laughs Beauchemin.
"But we got this other idea: What about pub-
lishing excerpts from a number of M.A.
theses?"

Shortly after that, Beauchemin got down to
work. The question of whose work will be
included in the anthology has occupied
Beauchemin since he began combing through
theses last July. (Robinson's spirit is still with
the project, though he recently moved to
Regina.) As editor, Beauchemin is responsible
for what gets inside the covers.

The anthology's working title, *The
Master's Voice*, is a take-off on the old RCA
Victor logo (which shows a dog captivated by

the clarity with which his master's voice is
reproduced on a recording) and slogan, but it
sums up well what the editor has in mind. "I'm
looking for two things to prove 'mastery,'" says
Beauchemin. "Voice and the staying power of
the images. The people in this anthology, I
believe, have voices of distinction."

Beauchemin's anthology of short stories,
novel excerpts, poetry, and play excerpts will
be drawn from the last ten years of Creative
Writing theses. "From 1983 to 1992 there
have been 80 graduates," he says. "I'll make
my choices from those."

Launch planned early next year

Not that the final votes are in yet.
Beauchemin—whose own collection of short
stories, *Hardraw Scar*, has just joined the ranks
of red-bound theses in the Webster Library—
still has more reading to do. And more
fund-raising. Concordia has provided some
financial support, and he hopes to raise
another \$1,500 before the book's launch early
next year.

"I'm not making any money on this, I just
want to promote the program and its grad-
uates," says Beauchemin, who believes *The
Master's Voice* could draw promising new
talent to Concordia's doors. "The writers who
come out of any writing program are the ones
who determine its excellence." ¶

CCW NEWS



Publications

Ray Smith hosted the
launch for his new novel,
A Night at the Opera
(Porcupine's Quill), at his Westmount home in
March. Earlier in March, the second printing of
Roma Bross's short-story collection, *To
Samarkand and Back*, was launched at the
Double Hook Bookstore. Beth Harvor, who is
well known for her short fiction (*Women and
Children, If Only We Could Drive Like This For-
ever*), has published her first book of poetry,
The Fortress of Chairs (Signal Edition, Véhicule

Press). One of Beth's poems also appeared re-
cently in *The New Yorker*. Cedric Speyer, who
is a psychotherapist as well as a graduate of
the Creative Writing Program, has co-written
eleven songs which appeared on a cassette/CD
release called *Fire and Roses*. Speyer tells us
that the album is available from Hearing Heart
Productions in Montreal. Grant Loewen's novel
Brick, Looking Up was published this fall by
DC Books, a Montreal publisher. Lucy Ng, who
was a 1990 runner-up in the CBC Literary
Competition (Fiction) has published an article
called "Food for a Chinese Soul" in the Sep-
tember issue of *Western Living*. Stephen
Henighan's short story collection, *Nights in the
Yungas*, (Thistle-down Press) was released this

October, just before Steve left his *Small
Presses* column (now overseen by Claire Roth-
man) at the *Montreal Gazette* to pursue a Ph.D.
in European Literature at Oxford. October also
saw the publication of Robert Majzels' novel,
Hellman's Scrapbook, (Cormorant).



Teaching Award

Concordia University's
Alumni Office nominated
English/Creative Writing
professor Terry Byrnes for the Canadian Pro-
fessor of the Year award. This is Byrnes' second
nomination for the award, which is
sponsored by the Council for Advancement
and Support of Education. Byrnes has been

teaching in Concordia's Creative Writing Pro-
gram since 1976.



Film

Screenwriting professor
Michel Choquette has
teamed up with former
student Louise Abbott to work on two TV docu-
mentaries on the history of the Inuit of
Northern Québec. Michel is the producer and
Louise is the writer-director. The documen-
taries will air on a new northern television
network, TVNC, in the fall.

Continued on next page



Writers' Union

Scott Lawrence has been
elected to a seat on the
National Council of The
Writers' Union of Canada as the rep-
resentative for Ottawa and Québec.



Fall Readings

This past September,
Creative Writing hosted
readings by writer-in-
residence Sharon Thesen, American novelist
Nicholas Delbanco, and Clark Blaise, who was
instrumental in establishing Concordia's
Creative Writing program. The Playwright's
Workshop of Montréal presented a public

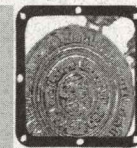
reading of Mansel Robinson's M.A. thesis,
Colonial Tongues, in October.



Donations to Layton Award

The Irving Layton Award
for Creative Writing is

now close to being a self-sustaining fund. Help
us get there by sending donations to: Univer-
sity Advancement, Concordia University, 1455
de Maisonneuve Blvd. West, Montréal, QC,
H3G 1M8. Make sure that your cheque is
clearly marked "Irving Layton Award." The
Layton Award, which is now in its fourth year,
offers prizes of \$500 each to undergraduate
writers in the categories of fiction and poetry.



Awards

Creative Writing grad-
uate Glenn Grant was
recently awarded a
Canada Council Explorations grant to
complete his novel, *Remote Sensing*. Also, a
story by undergraduate student Eleni Kapetan-
ios recently placed second in *Books in
Canada's* student writing contest.



CCW Library

For the past several
years, Creative Writing
has fitfully attempted to
establish a collection of publications by CW
graduates. Our attempt (possibly because

we've been asking for donations) has been un-
successful. Recently, Creative Writing
graduate Stephen Henighan wrote a letter to
the Concordia University
Library expressing his surprise that "[Concor-
dia], which prides itself on its Creative Writing
Program, does not make an effort [to acquire
books] by the Program's graduates." Robert
Wrightson, Assistant Director of Libraries,
responded promptly. The library wants to pur-
chase the books of CW graduates, but needs
our cooperation to collect titles, publishers
and addresses. Please
see next issue's CCW
News for more details on
the project's progress.





At the Layton Awards ceremonies in May: (Clockwise from left) Prose winner Constance Barnes Rose, Fiction jury head Rob Allen, Poetry jury head Gary Geddes, Poetry winner Cheryl Armour, Fiction honorable-mention recipient Denise Roig-Tarr, and Irving Layton, holding the son of Poetry judge member Bruce Taylor.

The 1992 Irving Layton Awards

festschrift announced to honor Creative Writing's most respected poet
by Raymond Beauchemin

POET IRVING LAYTON FEELS THAT THE winners of the 1992 Irving Layton awards for undergraduate fiction and poetry are students whose "verbal creativity is what living is all about."

said, after handing Layton a large bouquet of flowers at the awards ceremony. "But why not do something more meaningful? What is lacking is a book on Irving's work, putting together articles, memoirs of those who have

About 100 students and faculty were on hand to witness the annual awards ceremony this April.

Layton presented the \$500 awards for the winning submissions in poetry and fiction to Cheryl Armour and Constance Barnes Rose, both students in the undergraduate Creative Writing Program. Denise Roig Tarr, who submitted work in the fiction category, received an honorable mention.

Creative Writing professor Henry Beissel, the curator of the Layton Awards, used the occasion of the presentations to announce the publication of a *festschrift*—a celebratory book of articles and essays by a number of writers—in honor of Layton.

"Flowers, chocolates, and medals are fine," Beissel

known him, excerpts from correspondence, and literary contributions from other writers."

The university-financed publication, which Beissel will edit with Joy Bennett, the Concordia archivist in charge of the Irving Layton Collection, is scheduled for publication by Véhicule Press in 1993.

Layton a model

After the ceremony, Beissel said the Irving Layton Award was established four years ago to "raise the standards of excellence in the Creative Writing Program."

"We thought it would be a challenge to the undergraduate students ... toward the end of the year, to work a little harder, to polish their work in order to be able to enter it in a competition."

Beissel affectionately recalled the long history of Irving Layton's involvement with the Sir George Williams and Concordia English departments, as a teacher, reader and writer-in-residence.

"He has been a model for students through the depth of his commitment to poetry," Beissel said. "Irving has written some of the finest poems that have been published in this country. He needed to be honored."

See page 7 for profiles of the 1992 Layton Award winners

Canada Council Slashes Readings

University tries to take up slack
by Steve Szigeti

RECENT CHANGES AT THE CANADA Council will force a reduction in the number of Council-sponsored readings at Concordia.

The Creative Writing Reading Series at the University has, in the past, presented as many as 20 free readings by Canadian writers every year. Eight or more of these readings have been funded by the Canada Council's Public Readings Program, which pays travel fees and an honorarium. Yet, a recent Canada Council decision has reduced the number of funded readings by 50 per cent.

Until recently, the Sir George Williams and Loyola campuses were considered to be separate venues, each entitled to four readings. But the Canada Council no longer recognizes the two campuses as separate and will grant the University as a whole only four readings per year. As a result, the Creative Writing Program will explore alternative methods of bringing writers to Concordia.

Co-operative sponsorship with other organizations, for instance, can help to cover costs. To offset Thomas King's travel expenses last November, the Reading Series found a co-sponsor in the Mohawk Nation Bookstore in Kahnawake, on Montreal's south shore. Also, the American Consulate in Montreal has

offered several readers for 1992-93. The first of these, novelist, essayist and travel writer Nicholas Delbanco, presented a seminar on contemporary American fiction and read from his own work on September 28.

Finally, there is the University, and the Department of English, which recently funded readings by writer-in-residence Sharon Thesen, and Clark Blaise. Such measures are expected to minimize the effect of the reduction in Canada Council funding. Yet, further changes in the Council may have an additional adverse effect on funding.

This spring, federal Communications Minister Perrin Beatty announced the merger of the Canada Council with the Social

Continued on page 7

WHEN I WAS IN SCHOOL, A scene played itself out in Montreal's Chinese restaurants with monotonous regularity: after enjoying a great meal, my father would eagerly anticipate the arrival of the fortune cookies so he could say, "Let's see what the Creative Writing graduates are writing these days."

It wasn't funny the first time, shortly after I entered the undergraduate Creative Writing Program at Concordia, but it came to represent one of those annoying yet oddly comforting certainties that parents know are endearing. Eventually, it got me to thinking about life after school. And then I got to thinking about my own life. I was never so naïve as to think I'd be writing a great novel any time too soon, but what was my degree going to do for me?

Concordia shaped writing

It was comforting to know that I wasn't the only one with these thoughts; others admitted as much over a beer or two. Some would solve the problem by going straight to grad school. For me, the thought of returning to school was not appetizing at all. I'd had my fill.

Not that I didn't enjoy Concordia. Much of what I learned (or absorbed) there has shaped my writing and will probably stay with me forever.

After graduation, and some constructive procrastination, I found employment at Tundra Books, here in Montréal, a publishing house with a reputation for producing some of the best children's books in the country. And now I'm the Associate Editor (which even to me is a vague title, but that's what it says on my card).

I guess I wouldn't have been given the job without being a writer of some sort. Months after hiring me, the publisher told me that the

freelance editing I had done during school wasn't as much a factor in my getting the job as the writing was. And now she absolutely trusts me: all unsolicited manuscripts land on my desk; I work with the authors, helping develop their stories (a good number of them aren't writers at all, they're illustrators), keeping an eye on them, calling them when they've been

frankly, I'm hoping there's a cosmic force that will reward these acts with an acceptance letter of my own some day.

The one drawback to working full time is that my own writing has suffered. The discipline I learned (or thought I had) in the workshops of Concordia has abandoned me for the moment. I'm writing a fraction of what

I used to. I can't come home at night and stare into anything resembling a typewriter or computer any more. Weekends have now become the only real writing time left and often it's not nearly enough. By the time I get going, the weekend's over and I'm back at work, staring into the computer screen, trying to decide whether or not I've written the right word, whether or not the text will fit, given the point size and space limitations, or if the language is too complex for an educated eight year-old to understand.

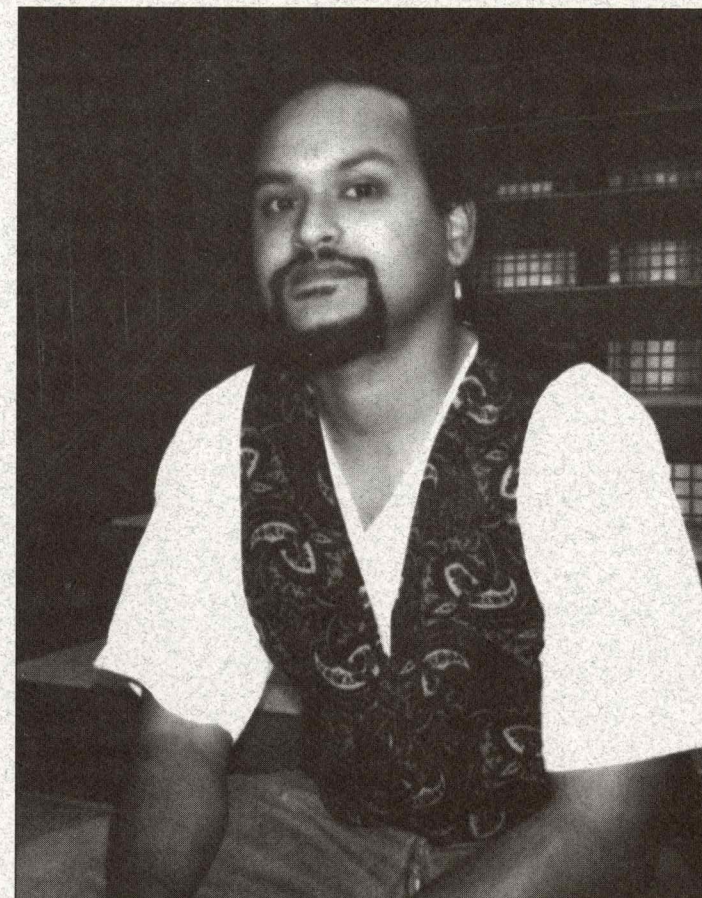
Publishing vs. writing

Although my own output is down, I can see the quality rising. I don't have to do as many revisions and my eye is more critical now—and this is something I've learned from my job. And it's a good job. I work with wonderful people, and the atmosphere in the office is loose. We are creating kids' books, after all!

Most of the time, especially given the economy right now, I'm thankful for what I have. I'm on the other side of the publishing business and it's fascinating. But

there's this voice inside of me, that nagging being that made me start writing in the first place, and it is deeply unsatisfied.

The bright spot in all of this? The fortune cookie scenes at the end of meals with my father have faded into memory. And given the medicinal qualities of time, these memories are good ones. ¶



Life after graduation

a full-time editor becomes a part-time writer By Arjun Basu

quiet for too long; I co-write the blurbs you see on the backs of books, the flap copy, the promotional stuff in the catalogs; and, most thrilling of all, I accept new author-illustrators, calling them up and telling them that we want to work with them.

I've only accepted two manuscripts or story ideas that came my way but that's still two and,

KAREN HAUGHIAN GETS MAD EVERY time she thinks of it. "How can anyone say 99 per cent of Canadians don't read, anyway?" she fumes, reminded of a politician's defense of cuts to financial support for writers. "When we Canadians publish good books, they're bought!"

Haughian is one of those people making sure that good books are published. As publisher of NuAge Editions, she put out 6 new books this year, including two plays by Montréal playwright Harry Standjofski, a

officially over) she was one of three people left to guide the four books through the final stages of production. "I was so close to it by that point, I couldn't let go," she says.

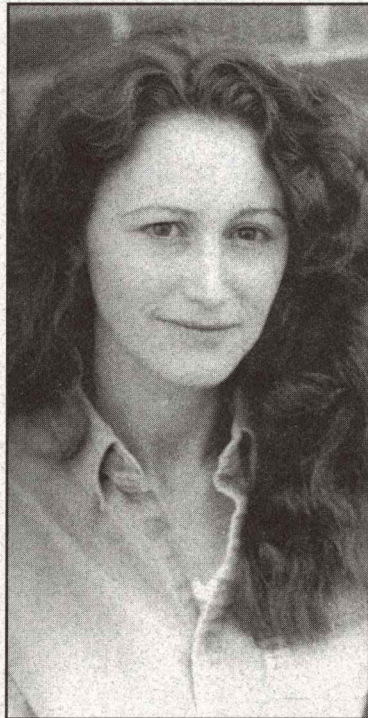
By the time the four books came out, there was no going back. Haughian describes the sensation when they were "finally, finally" off the press and into the stores. "We walked around feeling amazed," she says.

By Christmas, she and co-publishers Susan Usher and Odette Dube had another book coming out. Valmai Howe's *The Dreams of Zoo Animals* picked up some good reviews in

Recommending that all arts-funding be handled at the provincial level, the report's conclusions could put a serious crimp in English-language publishing. "The purely anglophone publications would get no money from Québec," Haughian fears, adding that the francophone literary community is also lobbying against the recommendations of the Arpin report.

But lobbying isn't really Haughian's thing. She came back from the capital feeling that she didn't want to be a politician. "I want to be a publisher," she says. "I just want to get the

"None of us had any idea how much work it was going to be, but I was so close to it by that point, I couldn't let go."

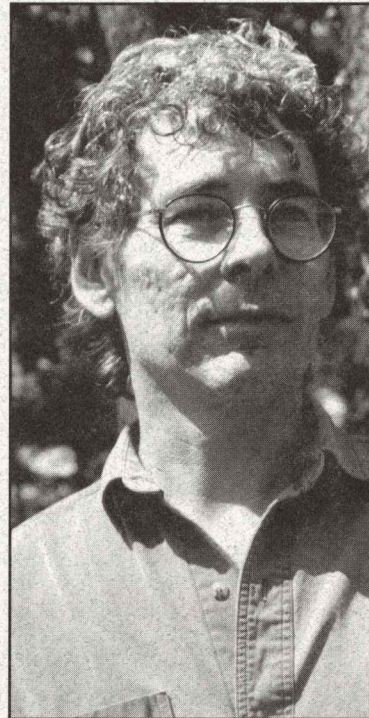


Small Is Bountiful

Concordia people keep literary presses running

text and photos by Denise Roig Tarr

In the Fall 1991 CCW NEWS, we featured Véhicule Press and Cormorant Books, small presses with a Concordia connection. For this issue, we spoke with Karen Haughian (l) of NuAge Editions, and Rob Allen (r) of the Moosehead Anthology.



"Most small presses are run by small collectives or coteries. They're run by people who think similarly."

novel by Lesley Choyce and *The Shadow Sonnets*, by Concordia Creative Writing teacher Richard Sommer.

Haughian "backed into publishing" while she was a graduate student in the Creative Writing Program. Auditing Gary Geddes's Editing and Publishing class in 1986, she found herself in a group of 16 students editing four books. "None of us had any idea how much work it was going to be," says Haughian, who came into the class armed with a new Macintosh computer, "no editing experience, and not a clue about what I was doing." At the end of April (the class was

the States and put NuAge on the literary map.

Staying on the map is what occupies Haughian now, as she runs NuAge on her own from a one-room, one-window office off St. Laurent Boulevard in Montréal. That, as any small press publisher will tell you, means locating funding—from the Canada Council and elsewhere. For Haughian, it also means organizing. An active member of AEAQ (Association of English Language Publishers of Québec), she testified in Québec City last fall after the controversial Arpin Commission Report on the arts and arts-funding was released.

books out there." And she wants to remain in Québec. "There really is a lively English publishing world in Montréal. I'm not going to give up on it."

Robert Allen was almost ready to give up on one of his contributions to the publishing world six years ago. The Concordia writing teacher, poet and novelist began to wonder if he hadn't taken the Moosehead Anthology "as far as I could go with it."

Launched by Allen and friends Steve Luxton, Hugh Dow and Jan Draper in 1977, Moosehead was an "international literary journal with regional emphasis." By 1986,

Continued on page 8

Writing for the child inside *continued*

written for a child. The ubiquitous commandments and codes of conduct that come with didacticism re-enforce the very terror of the adult world from which a good story is to free the child, or at least give it some relief.

As we grow up we forget what it was like to be a child, what it was like to live eye-level with the knees and bellies of giants who decide when and what you eat and do, where and when you play and sleep, whose will must be done at all times, and who respond to pleas and protests mostly with some form of punishment. It's not surprising Sarah and Jason are eager to grow up as soon as possible and, when they do, to forget their childhood.

There is, of course, another, brighter side to childhood: a playfulness that challenges and defies the immutable order of things; a sense of wonder that glories in the secrets of the world as it tries to unlock them; an exuberant spirit of curiosity and exploration that accepts no limitations; a creative imagination that acknowledges many realms of reality and considers nothing impossible; and an unshakable, profound joy at just being alive. Unfortunately, these insightful qualities all too often atrophy or even perish along with the passage of childhood.

If it is essential for everyone to recover the child inside so as to become a mature person, it is even more crucial for anyone determined to write for Sarah and Jason. Without a visceral understanding of their helplessness, their fears of the incomprehensible and largely merciless forces that surround it, and of the demons that inhabit their dreams and the dark, it is impossible to create stories that humanize this world and defuse its terror.

The source of all creativity

Folk and fairy tales of all peoples are crowded with mean, cruel characters and bloodthirsty animals in a grim, unforgiving universe. Such tales do not, as some of our moral guardians would have it, terrify Sarah and Jason or even incite them to become cruel and unforgiving themselves. Quite on the contrary, by capturing the demons in a web of words, these stories put them, ironically, in Sarah's and Jason's power, making their world safer, more hospitable.

There too, in the murky waters at the bottom of the pond of our experiences, among monsters and memories, lies the source of all creativity: the imagination. Childhood is close to it, and a writer must descend there to meet

the child inside and to find the language in which to communicate with Sarah and Jason. It will be a language that refuses to patronize them. Instead, it will treat them as equals, delighting them with stories that clarify and humanize the world. Because with it will come the realization that the world is still as full of wonder and terror as it was at the beginning, and that our playful, creative spirit alone can make it home for us.

If you want to write for Sarah and Jason, you must first learn to write stories for the child inside you. ♦

Canada Council slashes readings *continued*

Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). Although Beatty promised to maintain current levels of support, tight government funding for public readings already results in a rejection rate of up to 73 per cent of applications received in the heaviest funding period (Fall/Winter).

Beatty announced that the Research Council would receive a significant increase in funding, although no such promise was made concerning the Canada Council. He did confirm, however, that the new granting council will maintain its traditional arm's-length relationship with the government.

Canada Council chairman Alan Gotlieb appeared before the standing Commons committee on culture and delivered this warning about reductions in arts funding: "As Canadians, we face the danger of losing what has been created over 30 years of growth, and of leaving an impoverished cultural legacy to our children, whose major cultural resource will be the international mass media."

Forthcoming readings will include:

Jane Urquhart, whose first novel, recently translated into French, won an award as best foreign novel in France; Poet Roo Borson, Concordia's spring semester writer-in-residence; and Quebec novelist and theorist Nicole Brossard.

Creative Writing professor Mary di Michele said she is also seeking funding for *Pain, Not Bread*, an interdisciplinary presentation by Borson and artists Andy Patton and Kim Maltman. ♦

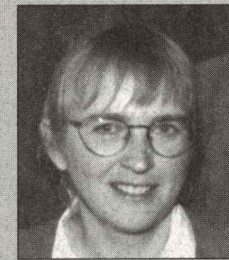
1992 Irving Layton Award Winners



Cheryl Armour, a South African native now living in Rigaud, north of Montréal, won for her long poem, "Divination (An Admission and a Tactic)." Creative Writing major Armour, who

reports that she is only nine credits short of fulfilling her requirements for graduation, was also short-listed for last year's Layton Awards for her short story "Good Boys".

Constance Barnes Rose, a Nova Scotian cum Montrealer and 1992 graduate of the Creative Writing Program, won for her short story, "Up Under the Subway." The students



named to the short lists in each category were Peter Tyler Boullata, Jason Colantonio and Todd Swift (poetry), and Denise Tarr, Todd Swift and Judith Isherwood (fiction).

The two panels of judges read over fifty entries each before deciding on the winners. The poetry judges were Gary Geddes, Mary di Michele and Bruce Taylor; in fiction, the judges were Rob Allen, Terry Byrnes and Yeshim Ternar. The Irving Layton Award for Creative Writing is open to undergraduate students in all faculties.

Photos by Barbara Davidson / CTR

Moosehead had already survived a series of unsettling changes: a move from the Eastern Townships to Montréal, new editors, and a shift from magazine to anthology.

As an anthology, Moosehead is neither fish nor fowl when it comes to institutional support, which is available only for the publication of books and magazines. To overcome this problem, Moosehead aligned itself with DC Books, an established publisher in Québec's Eastern Townships. The affiliation has been a success, and the thirteenth issue of Moosehead came out this summer.

Students as editors

"Most small presses are run by small collectives or coteries," Allen says. "They're run by people who think similarly." More than that, he feels that the people who are going to get published are "the ones who are willing to do all the work. It's almost medieval. You're recruited into a guild of sorts."

Further, he believes the most interesting new writing comes from small presses. "Of course," he says, laughing, "in Canada, they're all small."

There was nothing small about this year's editorial board for the Moosehead Anthology—14 students from Allen's Editing and Publishing class. "There's a certain craziness with that many people, but I like it," says Allen, who prefers that same wild mix when it comes to the anthology's content.

"We never know what we're going to publish. We get work from world-famous writers and from unknowns. As long as the mix keeps changing, then I'm still interested," he says.

Allen is not very worried about the fate of English-language publishing in Montréal. "Even if all the presses dry up, even if the Canada Council disappears, even if all the writers move away, the beast will rear its ugly head again."

Allen says that people won't stop writing. "And having written, they'll want to be published. It will persevere." ♣

Sharon Thesen

maverick poets and the workshop aesthetic
by Raymond Beauchemin

THE "WORKSHOP AESTHETIC" debate is probably as old as Iowa. Is it possible to teach creative writing in a university setting without the creativity being compromised or damaged along the way?

Sharon Thesen, Concordia's writer-in-residence, believes writing is "too maverick an art form to be hauled into a university department."

"That's not to say decent writing isn't coming out of these programs, but a lot of the writing has the stamp of 'committee' about it. Because of the workshop aesthetic, it's bound to be middle-of-the-road writing," Thesen says.

Thesen remembers when she was a young West Coast poet, careful about whom she could show her poetry to. This was 1964. There were two "beatnik" poets in Prince George at the time. She married one, and showed her poetry to the other.

"Everybody has to take their lumps in the process, no doubt about it. But if you're a real writer, an instinct has formed in you. My fear of creative writing programs is that they're wringing that instinct out of people. What is produced is competent, but I find it hard to get fired up about it."

So why come to Concordia's Creative Writing Program? To write poetry, finish a collection of critical essays and talk about writing.

Thesen is taking September through December off from her job at Capilano Community College in Vancouver, where she teaches basic grammar, composition and 20th Century poetry, to "lead a literary life with other writers. It's a daily salon situation that I find appealing." Thesen has been at Capilano since 1975.

Thesen is the author of five books of poetry, the most recent of which is *The Pangs of Sunday* (1990). She was nominated for the



Governor-General's Award for poetry twice: in 1987 for *The Beginning of the Long Dash* and in 1984 for *Confabulations, Poems for Malcolm Lowry*. She won the Governor-General's Award for editing *The Vision Tree: Selected Poems of Phyllis Webb* in 1981. Her most recent critical work was editing *New Long Poem Anthology*, published last year.

The poetry Thesen is writing now comes after a "crisis of faith in poetry that's lasted eight years. I was ready to give up, and to try prose. I wanted to become a 'real writer.' But I've been working on poems again and have accepted the fact that poetry suits my mind best.

"Prose requires energy, adrenaline... The amount of work involved is ridiculous. Poetry feels like a temperamental suitor, you never know where you stand, but when you finally get out to the dance, it's great and you have a good time."

Despite her feelings about the workshop process (she'd rather see post-secondary education institutions go back to classical subjects), Thesen is teaching an advanced poetry course at Concordia, and delighted to discover that her students have more experience and are more committed than they are at junior-college level. "It's a great pleasure teaching here," she says. "The conversation is sophisticated and informed, and when I mention a title, they know what I'm talking about!"

Sharon Thesen gave the first reading in the program's 1992-93 Reader Series, on September 25. ♣